

## Summary of the Workshop

The Royal Society of Western Australia, with sponsorship from the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Environmental Protection Authority, Chamber of Minerals and Energy, Centre for Ecosystem Management (Edith Cowan University) and The University of Western Australia, held an open workshop on the 'Co-ordination and Integration of Terrestrial Vertebrate Survey Data Bases for Western Australia', on 5 April 2002. The intention of the workshop was to address an important State-wide issue which has been a concept for many years but has never achieved any practical progress in establishing a database of surveyed terrestrial vertebrate fauna for Western Australia. More information about the Workshop and the issues are available from the Royal Society's website at <http://www.ecu.edu.au/pa/rswa/workshop/>.

The workshop was well attended by about 50 representatives of government departments, academic institutions, and business (including private environmental consultants). A number of papers were presented at the Workshop. This was then followed by considerable discussion amongst the participants on wide-ranging topics related to the establishment of a survey fauna database.

There was universal agreement amongst the participants that the need was now greater than ever for the establishment of a coordinated database of the terrestrial vertebrates surveyed in Western Australia. The timeliness of this workshop and the topic of a regional fauna database were highlighted by the release at the workshop of Position Statement No. 3 of the Environmental Protection Authority on 'Terrestrial Biological Surveys as an Element of Biodiversity Protection'. This document states emphatically (among other topics) that —

*The EPA expects that terrestrial biological surveys will be made publicly available and will contribute to the bank of data available for the particular region, to aid the overall biodiversity understanding and assessment by facilitating transfer into State biological databases*

and that —

*The EPA intends to encourage the coordinated development of a state-wide database for EIA-related biological surveys ....*

After widespread discussion at the Workshop, it was clear that there were two general (and not exclusive) approaches to establishing a fauna survey database for Western Australia —

- the Western Australian Museum fauna database be used as the basis for a coordinated survey database; this is a current, accurate and large database which is based on vouchered specimens lodged in the Western Australian Museum, and

- fauna survey data that are provided annually to CALM as part of their licensing system be used as the basis of a fauna database; such a database would consist of observational and unsubstantiated identifications of fauna, and therefore be prone to inaccuracies, so that some linkage with a verified identification by voucher specimens in the Western Australian Museum would be required to "value-add" to such a general database.

There was general agreement that the Western Australian Museum was the appropriate body to provide the correct nomenclatural classification (*i.e.* names) of all animals for any coordinated regional database — an appropriate system of animal names is an essential prerequisite for a fauna survey database.

It was considered essential that entries into the survey fauna database are checked for accuracy. The identification of specimens is often not an easy or unequivocal exercise. There needs to be some level of verification for records in a database, varying from just conformity to the presumed geographic distribution of species to the highest level of accuracy which is the vouchering of specimens in the Western Australian Museum. It was considered essential that specimens continue to be lodged with the Western Australian Museum for identification by experts in their taxonomic field, and for reexamination/reinterpretation of specimens, for example after taxonomic revision of animal groups or description of new species.

Although the scope and time constraints of a one-day workshop precluded the formulation of more specific plans for the implementation of a survey fauna database, it was clear that future progress required the participation and cooperation of at least three Government agencies (the Department of Conservation and Land Management, the Western Australian Museum, and the Environmental Protection Authority), and the participation of private environmental consultants and university academics and researchers. The Royal Society of Western Australia was seen as an appropriate body to be involved as a facilitator, for example by holding the initial workshop, by publishing its results, and by sponsoring future workshops.

The Royal Society of Western Australia encourages the establishment of a terrestrial fauna database. The Society wrote to the relevant Minister encouraging her to develop a terrestrial survey fauna database in cooperation with the various government departments, private consultants, and academic researchers in establishing a regional fauna database. The Royal Society of Western Australia, as an independent Society whose aim is to promote science in Western Australia, indicated its willingness to continue its role as a facilitator in the process.

Graham Thompson and Philip Withers  
Convenors